

LITTLE CHILDREN'S SUFFERINGS;
OR, IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?

BY MAY BATEMAN, *Author of "The Idyll of a Little Equestrienne," etc., etc.*

The sufferings of children! A vast range of sympathy opens out at the very phrase. We have all seen children suffer, if not in hospital wards, within the nearer haven of our own home; we have all heard the pitiful little moan of pain, and tried to soothe away the line of care which seemed so out of place on the small forehead. It is less easy to reason and sympathise with grown-up people's woes, and to me there is a special pathos in the blind confidence with which a child accepts our assurance that he or she "will soon be better" after the nauseous medicine has been taken or the maimed limb set—a confidence in our infallibility which I am afraid we "grown-ups" rarely appreciate at its full value.

It is in the attempt to interest the outside world in these same sufferings that these lines are written. Christmas is past and the New Year has dawned, and across the snow echoes the cry of the children. In the heart of London there exists an institution whose sole aim is to silence that cry and change its note to one of joy.

"The primary object of the association," to quote the opening words of an appeal which we lately distributed to some of our helpers, is to find for each sick child brought to our notice a friend who will brighten its dreary hours of pain, mention to the society any need it may have for special surgical appliances or peculiar medical attention, and in short do for the ailing little ones of the London poor what the mothers of the London rich do for theirs. It is a work which affects not only the present but the future. Weakness among the London poor gets worse with every succeeding generation. Of invalid

parents invalid children are begotten, and the line of sickness spreads till early frailty becomes a heritage. One's heart aches sometimes in entering the narrow, grimy streets to which our work takes us, to see weakly child after weakly child watching one's coming and going with almost as much excitement as the special little invalid friend to whom one is making one's way—children who probably in the future, at an age far younger than that at which we in our station of life marry, will in their turn propagate others weaker than themselves, and give to posterity the terrible legacy of transmitted disease.

To arrest the malady from infancy—to alleviate if not to cure pain—to accustom the children to refined influences of love and tact and sympathy—these are some of our aims. And what as to their fulfilment? At the present moment we have a large staff of volunteer helpers, some of whom look after two or more children. We have Miss Maclaren, our nurse, to visit special cases, to adjust "extensions," dress wounds, &c., &c. We have the District Nursing Association to apply to when we are in need of extra help, and the Charity Organisation Society to kindly and frequently share the expenses of some special requirement, as well as various other "sorts and conditions" of outside help.

At the office, in addition to an honorary secretary and his regular helpers, some ladies kindly give their services on one or more days in the week, and cope with the immense correspondence which our work entails. As may be imagined, endless care, interest, and patience are needed to keep in touch with the 1,800 or 1,900 cases which are upon our list. Daily there seems a new want or necessity; here a St. Thomas's splint is asked for; there a child requires extra nourishment, its disease being that terrible "wasting" with which we so frequently have to contend; here this one has to be sent to a convalescent home; there that other has to be fetched from the seaside; here everything is wanted, since the child is helpless, clotheless, and deserted; there a bright girl visitor, and book and toy are all that is needed to complete the convalescence begun in the hospital.

Most of us have read and wept over Mrs. Ewing's matchless "Story of a Short Life," but which amongst us realise how many, many Leonards there are fading slowly away in our great city, with no "Oriental coverings" to hide the poor

distorted limbs, with no soft shaded lamps to throw "pink shadows" on the poor wan face; with no tender voice to breathe high hopes and aims and aspirations, and show the likeness to the soldier's duty on the battle field, in the enforced patience and forbearance and endurance of pain; with no luxuries of fruits or flowers and music; with no comfort of soft pillows and "regulation" dressing-gown of red and blue; but with, instead, a bare room to live in, a harsh voice to hear, and only a dreary vista of pain and discomfort to point the way to the parish graveyard in which alone the wearied limbs may be at rest.

Come to these desolate homes and hear the cry of the children, and help save little lives which are drooping away in your midst. The Garden of Life is full of so many such frail blossoms, bruised and broken by the storm-rifts of poverty and disease. They cannot come to you and ask your help; they are too "passing weak," but if you go to them you will find your earthly reward in the welcome that awaits you, in the gradual improvement in health and spirits and surroundings of your little patient. You will find by his bedside the answer to Mallock's question with which I have headed this paper, and the prose of life turning to such poetry as that of Alfred Austin.

Is life worth living? Yes, so long
As there is wrong to right,
Wail of the weak against the strong,
Or tyranny to fight;
Long as there lingers gloom to chase,
Or streaming tears to dry,
One kindred woe, one sorrowing face
That smiles as we draw nigh;
Long as a tale of anguish melts
The heart, and lids grow wet,
And at the sound of Christmas bells
We pardon and forget.

While there is one untrodden tract
In Intellect or Will,
While men are free to think or act,
Life is worth living still!

And now to make the work clearer. Comparatively convalescent, as also some incurable cases, are at last compelled to leave the hospitals in order to make room for those other more

urgent cases in need of immediate medical or surgical care. The contrast between the haven of rest, or hospital ward, and the so-called "home" to which the little patient returns, is indeed a cruel one. Sick and wearied, the little life drags tiredly on, deprived of the tender care and attention of nurse and doctors, of amusements, and interests, and necessary comforts.

If convalescent the final recovery is retarded, and often indeed the child again falls seriously sick, through lack of attention, or by being too soon forced to take its share of earning daily bread. If incurable, the case is harder, when such a comfortless life has to be lived on year by year, its only change outlined by pain till Death's sickle mercifully falls. It is for these suffering children that we plead for the friendship of ladies who will spare an occasional hour to come to sit with and nurse them, giving the sympathy which soothes acutest pain, and the tender interest which the child's relations cannot spare time to give, so busy are they struggling and striving in the battle of life. A flower, a book, a toy, a bright picture will do much to while away a week in which the busy friend cannot find time to go in person to the bedside of her little protégé. And in time the interest on both sides deepens till the visitor herself looks forward with pleasure to her visits, for there are after all but three lasting joys on earth—the accomplishing of good work, the strengthening of friendships, and the joy of making the lives of others a little sweeter by our presence.

Once upon a time we cared little for these things. Surely Love's fulfilment was sweeter than the painting of a picture, the composition of music, the completion of a great and noble work; surely marriage-ties were closer than those of friendship, and the pleasure of helping another not quite so sweet as that of being helped! Ah! yes, true love and perfect marriage form as ever the greatest happiness on earth, but Love has wings and will not linger long in one resting-place, and marriage is not always or even often ideal, and all the world over one finds more broken hearts than whole ones. I suppose each of us who is capable of deep feeling has somewhere hidden away a heartache of some kind or another; a faith in God cemented with our heart's blood; a belief in all being for the best which was built up at cost of bitterest mental pain. "Out of our mistakes God builds up His completeness," someone wrote; from the ashes of these same mistakes the phoenix of sympathy may

rise, and from the harvest of Sorrow we may garner Peace, if we but once realise that there are other burdens heavier than our own, and that others lack our many compensations. While there is the cry of a little child to hush, while there is doubt to clear, anguish to soothe, while there are sky and sea and sun to speak of heaven, while there is yet a sigh to hear, an undone deed to do, Life is worth living!

NOTE.—For further particulars of the work of the Invalid Children's Aid Association, please apply to the Hon. Sec., I.C.A.A., 18, Buckingham Street, Strand.

OUR CHILDREN'S SUNDAYS.

BY MRS. C. H. CHASE.

"Sunday's the very nicest day in all the week; I wish it would come oftener." So said a little boy of six to his mother as she put him to bed one Sunday evening. Is there not in every good parent's heart the longing that Sunday should be to the children the best day of all the week? Some recall the strict tedious Sabbaths of their childhood, and do not wonder at the rebound which in the present day threatens to turn our English Sunday into the continental holiday. It may be helpful to very briefly consider what God would have Sundays to be to our children, and then what we parents can do to make them such.

We gather from the Old Testament that the Sabbath was meant to be, as its name implies, a day of *rest*; also a day of special worship. "Moreover also, I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them" (Ezekiel xx. 12; Ex. xxi. 12—17). Turning to the New Testament we find our Lord correcting the mistaken notions and exaggerated restrictions which had turned the *rest* into a burden "too heavy to be borne." He taught by words and acts that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," given to man for rest, for worship, and for doing good.

Here then we get our three points for the children's Sunday. It is to be to them a *rest* day, a *holy* day, a useful and therefore a *happy* day. So may it become to them, indeed, a type of heaven.

But how? Those little active limbs and brains, for ever on the go! What is rest to them? To sit still is downright hard work. No! rest to them is, what no doubt it is to many older ones, change of work, a variety of occupation. Sunday's occupations must then be as unlike those of the working days